



STATE OF NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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January 16, 2009

ATTENTION: Physicians, Hospitals, Diagnostic and Treatment Centers, Pharmacies,
Local Health Departments, Regional Office Directors
FROM: New York State Department of Health

**IMPORTANT HEALTH ADVISORY:
METHADONE DOSING FOR PAIN CONTROL**

Please distribute immediately to the Chief Medical Officer,
Emergency Medicine, Pain Management, Pharmacy

The purpose of this Health Advisory is to highlight, to physicians and pharmacists, changes in the recommended dosing for use of methadone to control pain in opioid non-tolerant patients.

There has been an increase in the use of oral methadone, previously used primarily in addiction treatment, for pain control. According to the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), between 1999 and 2005 there was a 16 percent increase in poisoning deaths where methadone was mentioned as a factor, during which time there were more than 900 methadone-related deaths in New York State (NYS).¹ Although NYS, with a death rate of 0.9 per 100,000 population in 2005, had one of the lowest rates of methadone-related mortality, close to 200 New Yorkers' lives were lost that year due to methadone-related poisoning.¹

In late 2006, a revised Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved package insert and an FDA Public Health Advisory alerted health care providers to the complexities of prescribing methadone for pain and provided new prescribing information for methadone products approved for pain control. Most notably,

“When oral methadone is used as the first analgesic in patients who are not already being treated with, and tolerant to, opioids, the usual methadone starting dose is 2.5 mg to 10 mg every 8 to 12 hours, slowly titrated to effect.” (p. 15)

The NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) web site contains additional guidance on methadone dosing for health care professionals.

Resources Regarding Use of Methadone for Pain Control

We encourage you to review the following materials to familiarize yourself with safety precautions and recommended dosing for use of methadone for pain control:

- FDA-approved package insert for Methadone Hydrochloride tablets.

- At: <http://www.fda.gov/cder/foi/label/2006/006134s028lbl.pdf>
- FDA-approved patient information for Methadone Hydrochloride tablets.
At: http://www.fda.gov/cder/drug/infopage/methadone_dolophine_PI.pdf
- FDA Public Health Advisory: Methadone Use for Pain Control May Result in Death and Life-Threatening Changes in Breathing and Heart Beat
At: <http://www.fda.gov/cder/drug/advisory/methadone.htm>
- NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services' Methadone Dosing
At: <http://www.oasas.state.ny.us/AdMed/FYI/MethadoneDosing-FYI.cfm>

Opioid Overdose Prevention

In NYS, Opioid Overdose Prevention Programs registered with the NYS Department of Health train non-medical individuals to reverse potentially fatal overdoses. These trained overdose responders may legally obtain and administer naloxone, an FDA-approved opioid antagonist. Information about opioid overdose prevention, including a registration form for interested providers and practitioners to become Opioid Overdose Prevention Programs, is available at: http://nyhealth.gov/diseases-aids-harm_reduction/opioidprevention/index.htm

Questions

Questions about Opioid Overdose Prevention Programs may be directed to the AIDS Institute at (212) 417-4770 or by sending an e-mail to hivprev@health.state.ny.us

Questions about controlled substances or prescribing controlled substances may be directed to the Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement at 1-866-811-7957, option 2, or by sending an email to narcotic@health.state.ny.us

Questions about addiction medicine may be directed to the Addiction Medicine Unit at OASAS. The Addiction Medicine Unit assists physicians and treatment practitioners integrate the latest neuroscientific findings and addiction medicines with clinical treatment protocols. The Addiction Medicine Unit may be reached as follows:

Web: www.oasas.state.ny.us/AdMed/index.cfm

E-mail: AddictionMedicine@oasas.state.ny.us

Phone: (518) 457-1349

References

1. Fingerhut LA. Increases in Poisoning and Methadone-Related Deaths: United States, 1999-2005. National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. February 2008.
At: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/hestats/poisoning_poisoning.pdf